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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Chavez Visit, Golan, Lebanon,
Palestinian Territories (8/31)

11. Summary: Syrian papers today continued to give prominent coverage to Venezuelan President Chavez's visit to Damascus. Papers reported that President Asad held a plenary meeting with his Venezuelan counterpart in the presence of members of the two delegations; afterward, the two leaders held a closed door meeting. Several agreements and protocols were signed between the Syrian People's Assembly and Venezuela's National Council in the presence of two Presidents. The two countries also entered into other agreements, whose topics include cooperation in the fields of environment, agriculture, and air and naval transport; political consultation between foreign ministries; and economic, trade, and technical cooperation, particularly with respect to oil, energy, media, and building and construction. The Presidents held a press conference following their meeting. President Asad said that Syria supported Venezuela's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council. Chavez offered to help Syria build an oil refinery, to enable it to export refined products, rather than crude oil.

Papers also reported that a resistance group in the Golan Heights threatened Wednesday to abduct Israeli soldiers, to be swapped for Syrian prisoners in Israel. In a statement faxed to foreign news agencies in Damascus, a group calling itself "Men of the National Syrian Resistance" threatened to "take the necessary measures" to secure the release of 16 Syrians jailed in Israel. The statement said: "The Lebanese model, the model of Hezbollah, is not so far from ours in planning for and implementing the release of prisoners."
End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad and President Chavez discuss bilateral cooperation, regional and international issues and hold a press conference. Asad: We agree on a multipolar world system that reflects world cultures and civilizations. Chavez: In my heart are thousands of love songs to the great people of Syria and to Damascus, the heart of Arabism" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/31)

"Chavez... a lovely Syrian day; President Asad: The Security

Council's continued submission to the US threatens more chaos and bloodshed. President Chavez: Israel is an obstruction to peace in the region. Thirteen agreements inked between Syria and Venezuela. Entry visas not required between Syria and Venezuela. Syria supports Venezuela's membership in the UN Security Council. Cooperation among Arab countries and Latin American states is enhanced. Israeli practices in Lebanon and Palestine are criminal" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/31)

"Israel welcomes Annan with a new crime in Gaza" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/31)

"Israeli violations of UNSC Resolution 1701 continue. Israel foils Al-Saniora's optimism and rejects Annan's call for removing siege on Lebanon and withdrawing from South Lebanon" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/31)

"National resistance in the Golan calls on Israel to release prisoners" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/31)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Chavez Visit Enhances the Course of Resistance"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (8/31): "Damascus today opens its arms and heart to a first-class statesman who embodies absolute courage in an age of submissiveness, capitulation, cowardice, and defeat....

"All Syrians today received with much love, appreciation, and respect Syria's great guest, President Hugo Chavez, the renowned leader who has rejected American dictates and proven that wise

and courageous leadership supported by the popular will can defeat the policy of force and despotism....

"The policies of Chavez and other Latin American leaders prove to everyone in this world that the policy of bending to the storm leads only to humiliation and capitulation, while the policy of confrontation, steadfastness, and rejection of dictates, pressures, and threats is alone able to protect countries and safeguard dignity and freedom....

"Certainly Chavez' visit will greatly bolster the policy of resistance, steadfastness, and confrontation and contribute to the birth of a new world free from unilateralism and the policies of domination and aggression...."

"Hugo Chavez, Welcome"

Elias Murad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Ba'th, commented (8/31): "Chavez is a free revolutionary who links the problems of the Arab nation to the problems of Latin America and realizes the possibility of waging and winning joint battles. He also believes that through the alliance of oppressed nations and states it is possible to prevail over the new international empire that the United States is leading....

"Syrians respect and appreciate the Venezuelan President, who proved to be more Arab than some Arabs when he summoned his country's ambassador from Tel Aviv to protest Israel's aggression against Lebanon and when he announced that what Israel was doing against the Lebanese and the Palestinians was also directed against the Venezuelan people....

"Syrians see in Chavez' visit a boost for the forces of justice, freedom, and independence and a challenge to the real threat to the world and its security, namely, the Israeli-American danger...."

"Another Comic Political Scene"

Khalid al-Ashhab, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/31): "In another comic political scene, pawns of the March 14 group in Lebanon have called on Hizbollah to prove its Lebanese identity and its patriotism.... Instead of succeeding in casting doubt on the patriotism of the Resistance, leaders of the March 14 group succeeded in proving their collaboration with and loyalty to foreigners....

"One who follows the political scene in Lebanon today will notice with a small laugh and bitter irony that pawns of the March 14 group, which hunt for lies, allegations and suspicions, realize that the elephants and the castles that protect them have failed to achieve their schemes and goals. Today they are trying to find a last breathe of life for their scheme in Lebanon and the region, after they have been baffled by the winds of the Lebanese Resistance. Therefore, the role that has been designed for these pawns has become restricted in anticipation of prominent and inevitable changes.

"Just as the Resistance does not need to prove its patriotism and Lebanese identity, so these pawns do not need to prove their treason."

Corbin